MID-TERM REVIEW

SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF ALGERIEN STEPPES: A PARTICIPATORY LEARNING APPROACH/

LA GESTION DURABLE DES PARCOURS STEPPIQUES: LA VOIE DE L'APPRENTISSAGE PARTICIPATIF

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CRDI : Centre de Recherches pour le Développement International
CREAD : Centre de Recherche en Economie Appliquée pour le Développement
DDZASA: Direction de Développement des Zones Arides et Semi Arides
DGF : Direction Générale des Forêts
HCDS: Haut Commissariat au Développement de la Steppe
INA: Institut National Agronomique
INRAA : Institut National de Recherche Agronomique d'Algérie
ITAFV: Institut Technique de l'Arboriculture et de la Vigne
MADR : Ministère de l'Agriculture et du Développement Rural
PPDRI : Projet de Proximité de Développement Rural Intégral
SAFA : Société d'Aménagement Forestier et Agricole
USTHB : Université des Sciences et Technologies Houari Boumediene

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SUMMARY

The main objective of the Mid-Term Review was to assess the performance to date of the 3-year project "Sustainable management of Algerian steppes" (November 2007- November 2010) in terms of the realization of its objectives and envisaged activities since its inception and to draw lessons and provide recommendations on the remaining period of the actual project. An additional objective was to analyse the degree of application of participatory and gender sensitive approaches and tools in the different project activities, as well as the degree and forms of participation and engagement of policy makers in the project. Both IDRC and the Algerian project team are acknowledged for their support to this mid-term review.

Main findings

The project "Sustainable management of Algerian steppes" is certainly considered outstanding with regards to the level and forms of policy engagement achieved in a very short period of time. It is also highly innovative in the Algerian context in terms of the application of participatory action-research approaches with view to building of multi-stakeholder partnerships among researchers, government representatives and farmers. The project has designed effective new models for steppe management, with a high probability of them being taken up by the Algerian government and being replicated in other zones in the country. This will require however continued and intensive follow-up to implementation of the selected models in order to ensure their success. In doing so, the team should avoid spreading too thinly and start transferring responsibilities for implementation to farmers and government institutions, also with view to future replication and sustainability of the project. In addition, the team should start focussing on developing a reduced number of high-quality scientific project outputs as well as communication materials strategically targeted at decision-makers at various levels. This will increase both the legitimacy of the project and enhance its impact at local and (inter)national level.

Key highlights

(i) Though only at its mid-term, the project already has been very successful at **influencing policies**, demonstrated by the fact that:
- ➔ a substantial amount of government co-funding (about 920,000 Canadian dollar) has been negotiated to support project's experimentations.
- ➔ for the first time, this funding will be used for state-funded forest and pastoral plantations on farmers' land, without expropriating them, and thus assuring joint responsibility for their proper management,
- ➔ the funding also has been allocated for experimenting with other new and innovative models for integrated steppe management that have not been tried out before.

In doing so, the project built on analysis of (the failures of) past state interventions, in which normally farmers' lands are expropriated and taken by the state to be planted upon, logically resulting in lack of community support for such preservation measures. The diagnosis implemented, also demonstrated that farmers will only rehabilitate their steppe lands -by not herding those lands for a period of time, coupled to replanting these lands with forage crops- if alternative fodder or income sources can be generated to feed their stocks of sheep in the meantime. The new models put forward by the project do now combine preservation measures, with intensive irrigated fodder production and development of complementary income-generating activities involving olive and fruit-tree plantations. All farmers and government officials interviewed, confirmed that, if successful, such models will be replicated by neighbouring farmers and in other zones of the country, as currently no real alternative management models are available to them.

(ii) A second key contribution of the project has been its capacity to **build multi-stakeholder partnerships for consultation, decision-making and management.** These partnerships contribute to:
- ➔ Promoting interaction between the government and the farmers, both learning to work in a relationship of confidence instead of distrust,
- ➔ Participation of and better coordination between a variety of government actors from different departments and at various levels (local, regional, national),

➔ Better organisation of farmers, which is essential for their participation in future decisions-making processes.

Developing such relationships of trust among various stakeholders has on its turn contributed to the quality of the diagnosis of the actual situation and the decision making on the courses of action needed. This through a better understanding of priority issues and the needs of the farmers involved (which were often not openly expressed before). It will also improve the likelihood of success and sustainability of implementation through enhanced acceptance and ownership of the project.

Support provided to new forms of farmer organisations (promoting farmer management of the models, information exchange and learning, and collective management of water-wells and other resources) and government coordination will result in building of participatory decision-making and governance. The latter is seen as a crucial precondition for attaining the other project development objectives, specifically the rehabilitation of natural resources and improvement of livelihood conditions.

(iii) Thirdly, **capacities of the team in participatory action research and sustainable steppe management have been strengthened and are acknowledged**:

➔ The project team has gained a high level of legitimacy and recognition by key government institutions, demonstrated by the fact that the team was asked to perform an evaluation of about 40 other state-funded projects concerning steppe management,

➔ The team has been contacted by a French organisation interested in developing a training programme on participatory action-research methodologies for African researchers and NGO-staff, and has already embarked on first exchanges with project teams in other African countries.

Main recommendations

As outlined above, the project managed to shift "the way of thinking about steppe management" and has put forward alternative and new integrated steppe management models. If deemed successful, these models will be taken up and replicated at a large scale. Guaranteeing such success will to a large extent depend on prioritising for the coming period, continued support of the project team to project set up and implementation. Such support should however be gradually transferred to other stakeholders over the course of the project, in order to increase the capacity of farmers and government institutions in managing such processes themselves, thus enhancing the sustainability and future replicability of the project. It will also be important to communicate project findings to a larger public, both in form of (a limited number of) high quality scientific publications as well as specific communication materials targeted at decision makers, so that lessons learned can be integrated in other action-research projects and state-funded programmes. For this purpose, a communication strategy should be developed.

It is further recommended to:

- Better monitor the own financial contribution of the direct project beneficiaries (18 households) to expanding project activities as well as the adoption rate of proposed technical and organisational innovations among the households not directly participating in the project, both indicators for farmers' assessment of the relevance of the project,
- Document the applied process of participatory action-research and policy intelligence and assistance in more detail, as they contain very valuable information and insights to other stakeholders interested in replicating similar processes,
- Consider a (budget neutral) extension of the project with 1 year to allow for analysis of the results of the experimentation during at least two growing seasons, It will after all be difficult to judge project results after only one year of experimentation, especially since rehabilitation of the steppe and generation of alternative income sources from tree-production will take a longer period of time and are influenced considerably by general climate factors and rainfall. By doing so, the project will also accompany the state-funded project during its entire 2-year project period (from Nov 2009-Nov 2011), that once completed will bring a unique contribution to sustainable management of the steppes.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Project design

The 3-year project "Sustainable management of Algerian steppes" (November 2007-November 2010) was set up to follow a three-step process of diagnosis, design and experimentation, dissemination of results and promoting their uptake:

Diagnosis
The diagnosis consisted of two parts:

Part 1: An analysis of past state interventions for improving steppe management in Algeria, their results, failures or conditions for this success.
Part 2: A socio-economic, institutional-political, technical-productive and natural resources diagnosis of the study area and the targeted community (Hadj Mechri).

Design and experimentation
Based on the findings from the diagnosis, "one or more models" for a better management of the steppe were to be designed. The models should involve both institutional/organisational/management aspects as well as technical ones. These models will be tested with the targeted community.

Dissemination and uptake
Results of the experimentation are to be analysed and their conditions for wider replication and uptake defined. The results of the project will then be disseminated to various stakeholders involved in steppe management, but principally local, regional and national authorities.

During the time of the mid-term evaluation the diagnosis had been completed and 5 steppe management models had been defined. The project team had also succeeded to formulate and negotiate a large complementary state-funded project (PPDRI) supporting the experimentation phase. Components of some of the 5 models had been put in place, though their complete set-up is only envisaged by February/March next year.

1.2 Objectives of the mid-term review

The objective of the mid-term review was to review the performance to date of the project and to identify and analyse:

- **a.** The possible difficulties and bottlenecks that limited its development and the realisation of the project objectives and activities,
- **b.** The degree to which the objectives and expected results of the project are being met and the relevance, efficiency and efficacy of the strategies applied in doing so,
- **c.** The degree of application of participatory and gender sensitive approaches and tools in the different project activities,
- **d.** The degree and forms of participation and engagement of policy makers in the project,
- **e.** Possible recommendations for the remaining period of the project.

1.3 Methodology applied

A Terms of Reference for the mission was developed with the IDRC program officer responsible of this project (Marwan Owaygen) and shared with the Algerian project team. It is important to emphasize that the review was conceived as a *formative* evaluation. The major part of the discussions and the field visit implemented were thus dedicated to discussing current issues and did not aim to judge activities implemented in a normative way. As a result, the review brings to light elements for debate and key challenges to be addressed, including findings of a more operational character. It is to be noted however that:

- The models to be experimented with in the project study zone are still in a very early stage of implementation. Only a partial view on their relevance and adequacy can thus be provided.
- The review does not pretend to be exhaustive, but aims to highlight some key aspects and challenges of the project. This will help the project team to concentrate on these main opportunities for project improvement.

The review took place in the period from 15 October to 15 November 2009. It consisted of the following activities:

a. Desk review of the project document, the project monitoring plan and 4 technical project reports,
b. Development of a short questionnaire for self assessment by the Algerian project team. The team presented the results of this auto-evaluation on the first day of the visit to Algiers, which was very useful in stimulating further discussion,
c. A mission to Algeria was implemented from 17-21 October, 2009. During this mission meetings and discussions were held with the project coordinator Mr. Ali Daoudi and the members of the project team. A field trip to the project site Hadj Mechri was implemented on 19-20 October. During this field visit discussions were held with Mr Bédrani (member of the project team), several of the farmer beneficiaries of the project as well as various staff of partner organizations, notably the MADR-Direction des Services Agricoles de wilaya (Lamine Benhacime) and the DGF-Conservation des Forets (Salah Hefah).
d. A feedback meeting was organized back in Alger with the entire project team, during which also the project monitoring plan was revised.
e. Elaboration and sharing of the draft report with the Algerian project team and IDRC.
f. Drafting and submission of the final report, after addressing the observations made on the draft report.

2 REVIEW OF PROGRESS

2.1 Overall assessment

A positive balance

In its first phase the project has been relatively efficient. The efficiency can however be improved by better focussing on main project activities (supervising project implementation) and project outputs (a limited number of high quality scientific publication and strategic communication materials).

The project has been very efficient in influencing policies (resulting in government co-funding of new and innovative models for integrated steppe management for an amount of 935.000 USD), building multi-stakeholder partnerships and relationships of trust between farmers and government representatives and enhancing the capacities of the team in participatory action-research.

The project is also very relevant in its contribution to more participatory steppe management at local level. The models that are being implemented have a high probability of being taken up by the Algerian government to be replicated in other zones in the country. This will require however continued and intensive follow-up to implementation of the selected models in order to ensure their success.

Main recommendation for the remainder of the project

The main recommendation in order to successfully finalize the project is to focus on and prioritise supervising implementation of the models, gradually transferring such responsibility to other stakeholders, and developing communication materials strategically targeted at decision-makers at various levels. This will increase both the legitimacy of the project and its impact at local and national level.

2.2 Efficiency

The efficiency of the project can be considered from various perspectives. The efficiency of the project is considered very high in terms of generating complementary resources for the project. The relation between inputs, activities and outputs can however only be considered as fair because: (i) the diagnosis implemented went much beyond what was needed for purposes of the project and (ii) there is a need to get more focussed on the production of important project outputs, specifically a (limited) number of high quality (scientific) reports and articles, as well as communication materials targeted at decisions-makers (for this latter component see &2.3). It is acknowledged though, that in this first phase of the project, a lot of time had to be spent on negotiating additional public resources for the experimentation phase- a crucial factor for success and future uptake of project results. The commitment of the project team in doing so, whilst always assuring participation of all stakeholders –farmers and decision-makers- is to be acknowledged.

Generating complementary resources
As stated above, the project team has been very successful in generating complementary resources for project implementation. A government fund for Integrated Rural Development (PPDRI) has been negotiated for the amount of 65.806.000 Dinar (equivalent to about 930.000 US$). Furthermore, in-kind support in form of fruit-trees and forest plants has been obtained from ITAFV and SAFA, of an additional estimated value of about 5.000 USD. Additional and future support is still expected and should be documented and its monetary value calculated.

More important however than the additional funding as such, are the facts that as a result of this state commitment and engagement:
(a) more integrated actions can be developed;
(b) more households can benefit from the total available resources –thus increasing project size and the reliability of results,
(c) participating households will have more faith in and will better adhere to the project agreements (as a result of trust created by the financial state involvement and the fact that interventions to be tested will benefit their family economy to a larger extent), and
(d) policy uptake of the project results (if successful) will be facilitated.

The diagnostic studies went much beyond what was needed for planning purposes
The objective of the diagnostic studies was to come up with proposals and recommendations for the design and set up of the management models to be experimented with. They were however much more comprehensive than the intended “exploratory studies” and went much beyond what was needed for preparing the experimentation phase. As the team commented “we had too high scientific ambitions at the start, and should have better prioritised the collection of information”. This work load taken on may have been one of the reasons for some researchers to leave the team. Another risk inherent to doing such comprehensive studies may be the over-burdening of farmers for information as well losing their interest, since only information is collected from them and they see no concrete results, nor things happening on the ground. It would thus be interesting to include in the report on the diagnosis (to be prepared) not only a description of what was done, but also to reflect on the (optimum) set of data that should be collected in future projects that have such a planning purpose.

The commitment of the project team is to be acknowledged
The initial project team was made up of at least 10 researchers and a group of master/PhD students. As none of the members of the project team however received a direct financial compensation for their involvement, the project team was quickly reduced to 3 researchers working on the project almost full-time, and 2-4 researchers/students supporting the project in specific activities. This has slowed down implementation of activities (notably the production of reports and scientific articles on the diagnostic and planning phase) and put additional burden on the remaining staff. Despite the small size of the remaining team, their effort, engagement and level of professionalism have contributed significantly to the current achievements of the project. This contribution is one of the reasons of the overall high level of efficiency and of effectiveness of the project. The project team has also gained a high level of legitimacy and recognition by key government institutions, demonstrated by the fact that

the team was asked to perform an evaluation of about 40 other PPDRIs concerning steppe management. Their leading role should be acknowledged.

Challenges:

Need to focus on a limited number of high quality project outputs
In the project monitoring plan made at the start of the project, development and publication of several types of project outputs were foreseen:

- (scientific) reports based on the various components of the diagnosis and design phase
- scientific articles for submission to a peer-referenced journal
- information brochures or video-materials on the various components of the diagnosis and design phase to be disseminated to the local community and decision makers.

By the time of the mid-term review, none of these project outputs had been produced yet, partly because of the reduction in the size of the team and partly because of lack of time.
The team is recommended to focus on a limited number of high quality and key publications only. It is the opinion of the mid-term review that the following project outputs should be prioritised:

- 2 (scientific) reports, one on the diagnosis and design phase and one on the experimentation phase, and –as stated above- highlighting activities implemented, results achieved and lesson learned/ recommendations with view to future replication of the process,
- 2-3 scientific articles (one on the analysis of past state interventions in steppe management and 1 or 2 on the diagnosis of the study area and the results of the experimentation phase)
- A small number of well-targeted information brochures/materials on the participatory action-research process implemented and the results of the experimentation phase (both with views to larger dissemination and uptake of results) –see further &2.3 Effectiveness.

A joint project for different institutions
The project is implemented in partnership among 4 different research/teaching institutions: CREAD, INA, INRAA and USTHB. The partnership is however still mainly based on relations between individual researchers, much more than institutional relations. It will be important to further institutionalise this collaboration, also in order to ensure that project staff continues to be given the needed institutional leverage and support to work on the project (something that might come in risk after a change in direction of the institutions).. It will also be important in all communications about the project, to stress this multi-institutional partnership and not only address the project as “the CREAD project”.

2.3 Effectiveness

The overall effectiveness of the project, indicating the extent to which the outputs of the project have helped/will help to attain the immediate project objectives, is also considered to be high. The following observations can be made regarding each of the six immediate project objectives:

Immediate project objectives	Level of effective-ness	Observations
1.Make a participatory analysis of past state interventions in steppe management and identify factors of success as well as failures	High	Findings from the analysis of past state interventions have been fed into the design of the steppe management models to be experimented with. In most past interventions, part of the farmers’ lands were expropriated and taken by the state to be planted upon, logically resulting in lack of community support for such preservation measures. The project managed to shift this way of thinking and promotes for the first time state-funded forest and pastoral plantations on farmers’ land, without expropriating them, thus assuring joint responsibility for their proper

		management. It will be important to communicate these findings to a larger public, so that lessons learned can also be integrated in other state interventions (see the list of proposed publications above).
2.Characterise the behaviour of the users of the steppe in Hadj Mechri with regards to the exploitation of natural resources, as well as their socio-economic, institutional, technical and natural determinants	Fair	Better understanding of the rationale behind use (and over-exploitation) of the steppe has been crucial to defining the models to be experimented with (see also below). However, the diagnosis implemented went much beyond what was needed for planning of the experimentation phase and could have been focussed better on its main purpose (see also the efficiency of the project).
3.Design, experiment and evaluate models for the preservation and improvement of steppe resources, taking into account findings from the diagnosis phase.	High	A principal lesson learned from the diagnosis is that steppe lands can only be rehabilitated -by not herding those lands for a period of time, coupled to replanting the lands with forage crops and minimising wind and water erosion- if alternative fodder or income sources can be generated to feed the stocks of sheep. The 5 models to be experimented with are thus all build on various combinations of rehabilitation of certain steppe areas, erosion prevention, intensifying fodder production in other areas (through use of irrigation or planting of fodder crops) and enhancing income generation through the plantation of fruit and olive trees. An organisational model for experimentation has also been set up, with the farmers constituting a management committee. Also frameworks for participatory monitoring, learning and evaluation have been developed. Components of all 5 models have been implemented already, though their set up should be completed by February/March next year in order not to miss the coming growing season. Support to this set up should be the main focus in the coming months.
4. Define the preconditions for success with regards to the steppe management models experimented with, and outline the conditions for their possible replication in other areas in the country.	Potentially very high	The models designed (see above) constitute a unique contribution to new forms of steppe management that have not been tried out before. Government representatives whom were asked about their views regarding such replication, all responded that the models (or components thereof) would surely be replicated, that is **if** they were deemed successful. Guaranteeing such success will to a large extent depend on the continued support of and supervision by the project team. It will however be difficult to judge project results after only one year of experimentation, especially since rehabilitation of the steppe and generation of alternative income sources from tree-production will take a longer period of time and are influenced considerably by general climate factors and rainfall. Nevertheless, certain trends, success factors and preconditions (in form of state support, control or regulation) will definitely be defined, also by looking into similar experiences in other areas. It is recommended to IDRC to consider a (budget neutral) extension of the project with 1 year to allow analysis of the results of at least two growing seasons and also to accompany the PPDRI during its entire 2-year project period (from Nov 2009-Nov 2011).
5. Disseminate the results of the project to interested and concerned	Potentially high	Several decision-makers and technical government staff have been engaged in the project from the start and been involved in all major project activities and

stakeholders, specifically decision-makers at local, regional and national level		events. Intermediate project findings have thus been continuously communicated to them, resulting amongst others in their engagement in activities on-ground and funding of the experimentation phase. Dissemination of project results to a broader group of decision-makers and other stakeholders should however still be planned for and requires a further communication strategy.
6. Strengthen the capacities of the project team in participatory action-research	High	When the project team was asked to: "*Indicate the extent to which you consider that you have achieved the project objectives"*, the team judged that they had made most progress on -and important contributions to- the putting in place of a participatory action-research process, in which farmer households, government representatives and researchers work together in the design and setting up of experimental models for steppe management. This coincides with the perception of the mid-term review, since this contribution was also highlighted by both the farmers and government staff when asked for their views on the project (see the next chapter for further evidence). Unfortunately, the number of young researchers (students) involved in the current project is lower than originally envisaged limiting thus their exposure to and training in such methodologies.

Challenges:

Supervision and support to the experimentation should be the main focus in the coming months, but gradually transferred to other stakeholders

Government officials caution correctly, that uptake of project results will only take place if the models that are being experimented are successful. It will be essential that all models will be fully operational by the start of the next growing season in February/March next year. As installation of some components, such as the drilling of a well, may still take a couple of months, the team should continue its efforts to speed up and facilitate administrative processes where possible.

To help achieve such success, intensive support and supervision during the experimentation phase will also be required from the project team, especially since they are still the main interlocutor between the farmers and the government. However, such support and supervision should be gradually transferred from the team to involved farmers and government departments, which can take on specific roles according to their interests and institutional mandate. The project team is currently and *de facto* playing a multiplicity of roles: mobilisation of the multi-stakeholder partnership, implementation and monitoring of the different models, knowledge production and dissemination. Even if multitasking is recommendable, the project team might run the risk of stretching their capacities too thinly during this implementation phase and as a result might lack the time for analysis and consolidating results in form of different project outputs and dissemination materials. Also, by maintaining a key role in supervising implementation, conditions are not created for other stakeholders to take over and become in charge of implementation, something which will be required from them when replicating the project/process in other areas. It will thus be important to start delegating over time some of these supervision roles to other stakeholders in the process.

Need to develop a communication strategy

The production of scientific reports and articles does not automatically lead to development of adequate "communication products" that will reflect the wealth of the project in terms of knowledge and know-how generated on participatory action research methods and tools, and sustainable models for steppe management.

Apart from communication products targeted at different levels of government, also the production of farmer communication materials should be considered. Although the project focuses primarily at broader policy uptake of findings, it is also crucial to make sure that farmers in other areas understand and become convinced of the relevance of the management models that will be proposed. Written information materials might have a very limited effectiveness for this specific group. The project team has already filmed part of the activities and might expand on this to produce a short video on the various models.

Since the majority of the dissemination efforts are planned for 2010, it would be useful for the team to reflect in more detail on the needs of the different target audiences and tailor their communication strategy accordingly (what materials should be produced?; making use of which media?; with what type of content and design?). Development of such a communication strategy, as well as development of the communication materials itself, should preferably be done by a communication expert, also to avoid further pressure on the core team.

2.4 Relevance of the project

The relevance of the project assesses the achievement of the project's overall development objectives and of the relation between immediate (project) objectives and development objectives. Three development objectives can in fact be identified from the project document:

- Contributing to more participatory steppe management,
- Contributing to the rehabilitation of natural resources,
- Contributing to improving the socio-economic conditions of the steppe communities.

The project team, farmers and government staff all considered that the project's main contribution to the development objectives is the *contribution to more participatory steppe management at local level.* The mission fully endorses this opinion, based on the interviews and the field visit, which demonstrated farmers expressing clearly and strongly their view to the authorities. With regards to the other two development objectives, it is still too soon to assess the impact that the project will have on the rehabilitation of natural resources and the socio-economic conditions of the participating households. However, the degree of rehabilitation of one area of land that was not grazed upon for a couple of months, had positively surprised both the researchers and the farmers. The area, resembling pure desert at the start of last season, now showed quite an extensive vegetation cover. And as one of the farmers commented: *"I had never imagined that such rehabilitation would be possible. I am very happy to see this and teach my children about this. I want the steppe to be green again".* Another farmer complemented this by saying "*We will have to learn how to use the steppe rationally to avoid degradation of our other areas of land".* Similarly, and though improvement in socio-economic conditions of participating households cannot be evaluated yet, some of the project beneficiaries as well as other households in the community not directly benefiting from the project, started already replicating parts of the models with their own resources, indicating to a certain extent that they expect the models to have a positive economic benefit. Both such level of own contributions as well as the adoption rate among non-project beneficiaries should be monitored as indicators for farmers' assessment of the positive effects of the project on improved vegetation cover and socio-economic conditions.

Change in attitude towards participatory consultation and decision-making

A key contribution of the project is the change in attitude of both farmers and government staff in the study area towards participatory consultation, decision-making and management. This contribution is made visible at two levels: at the level of the farmers themselves and at the level of interaction between the farmers and government officials.

At the level of the farmers the project is experimenting with 3 new organisational models:

- A local committee of farmer experimenters, integrating all 18 beneficiaries and promoting farmer management of the models and information exchange and learning,
- Collective management of water-wells,
- The formation of an association of farmers.

This is important since in general producers cannot effectively make claims on public resources nor participate in policy decisions that affect them unless they organize themselves in organisations with some degree of recognition by government.

At the level of interaction between farmers and government representatives, both groups considered that the project has helped to create a relationship of trust between them. As one government official from MADR stated *"Before the project, and generally in other situations, we were always regarded by the farmers with a certain degree of animosity and were not considered as their allies. Farmers thus did not always tell us the true opinions and views, nor clearly and openly expressed their needs and ideas. Now they do and this is essential if a project has to have good results. I know better now how to communicate with farmers and decide on interventions together with them. I will certainly apply this approach in my other work"*.

This building of participatory decision-making and governance is thus also inherently seen as a crucial precondition for attaining the other two development objectives (rehabilitation of natural resources and improvement of livelihood conditions).

Challenges:

Monitoring adoption rate

The current project monitoring and evaluation framework does not consider yet monitoring the own financial contribution by project beneficiaries nor the adoption rate of (components of) the models by other farmers in the community. It can however already be observed that 2 of the 18 direct beneficiaries already invested their own resources in expanding project activities by buying more fruit trees, while many non-direct beneficiaries have indicated their interest in joining the project and taking up (part of) its components. The team is therefore recommended to include the following indicators in their project monitoring framework: (1) Own financial contribution of the direct project beneficiaries (18 households) to expanding project activities and (2) Adoption rate of proposed technical and organisational innovations among the households not directly participating in the project, either in the same zone as where the project is implemented, or among households in other areas with whom exchange visits have been organised. Such indicators can be monitored through use of field observations and semi-structured interviews among the beneficiaries as well as Focus Group discussions with the wider and other communities.

Promoting rational use

The rehabilitation of the steppe can only be sustained if farmers will continue to apply a more rational use of their lands and carefully manage the amount of pressure (grazing) on each area of land. As expressed by the farmers, they have lost such knowledge and need to be trained again on how to do so. Real effects of such rational use will however only be visible in 4-5 years time. The institutions managing the current project are recommended to continue working on such a longer-term management model, revitalising traditional knowledge, and possibly to be supported by IDRC.

3 LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE REVIEW WITH REGARDS TO THE APPLICATION OF PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES AND LEVELS OF POLICY ENGAGEMENT

This chapter will look at two components of the project in more detail, being the application of participatory and gender sensitive action-research approaches and the engagement of policy makers in the project. Some lessons learned and points for reflection will be outlined below.

3.1 Participatory action-research

Preconditions for success

The project team has gone through an important learning process and is confident in their ability to conduct participatory action-research processes and to act as facilitators, mediators and linking community and government actors. The review mission agrees with this opinion. The team has consolidated their skills, applying them daily in the project, and they have effectively organized and implemented the participatory action-research process so far. Developing a complete cycle of participatory diagnosis, planning, implementation and monitoring-evaluation can be considered an important and innovative contribution of the project, especially in the Algerian context where such processes are not common place. This

is made possible because several pre-conditions for successful participatory processes were put in place:

- The involvement of a very experienced and motivated project team and their high levels of time-investment in the project,
- The guarantee of good working conditions in terms of availability of transport to the study site (located at 500 km from Algiers) and the presence of a project office on site,
- Encountering a common interest among researchers, farmers and government representatives, being the promotion of a more rational use of the steppe and the trying out of new solutions/alternatives to the past strategy of mere preservation and denying of any future grazing use (by expropriating the land from the farmers),
- The implementation of actions on a sufficient scale to be of interest to the farmers and the government. As state earlier, the complementary PPDRI funding negotiated played a very important role in this respect.

When documenting the process, these preconditions should be illustrated. In fact, the reports on the diagnosis and the experimentation phase should describe: (a) what was done and how; (b) with what results; (c) what were lessons learned for implementation and success and (d) recommendations for replication (including a description of what would they do different next time- see also the comments made on the diagnosis in & 2.3), Such documents would then contain very valuable information and insights to other stakeholders interested in replicating similar processes.

Gender mainstreaming

Though the 5 management models do not include any specific gender-affirmative actions, resulting from the fact that women have no direct role to play in steppe management nor desired to play a role in the creation of new income generating activities (as expressed by the women themselves), the project team did manage to approach the topic of gender mainstreaming by:

- The creation of a gender balance in the project team (2 out of the 3 main project staff are women),
- The direct interaction of women project staff with the beneficiaries, which is not always common in Algerian steppe communities.

The team is still recommended to further look at how the project will impact on the livelihood conditions of women in the community (for example with regards to access to and use of economic resources or their involvement in new income generating activities), though it is well acknowledged that such processes require a change in social relations and do not happen over-night. Especially if recommendations for replication of the project are proposed, the possible impacts of changes in management of the steppe on the livelihoods and interest of women should be further analysed.

Development of future training aids

Based on the experiences gained, and to be gained in the coming period, the team could play an important role in training stakeholders how to setup and manage participatory-action research processes, also after the life-time of the current project. By doing so, the number of (young) researchers, professionals and government staff capable to design and implement such projects would gradually increase. The team has already started thinking of such a follow-up project and has established first contacts with a French organisation possibly interested in supporting this. The team is starting to embark on cross-country exchanges of experiences, with other project teams in Sub-Saharan Africa.

3.2 Government engagement

Government engagement visible in different forms and on different levels

Though government engagement in form of providing complementary project funding may be the most visible form, their engagement may even be considered more important in terms of their acceptance to finance new modules for steppe management that (a) have not been tried out before and (b) depart from new hypotheses concerning steppe management (promoting rational use instead of preservation; and combining rehabilitation with erosion control, intensification of fodder production and diversification of income sources). In addition, government engagement is achieved at various levels, from the local, to the regional and

national, and between various government departments (DDZASA, DGF, HDCS and MADR), which is not easy to obtain.

Policy intelligence and assistance formed the basis for government engagement
In the opinion of the review mission this high level of policy engagement has been achieved due to:

- Application of various forms of policy assistance (understood as a process through which an agency seeks to assist and influence policy making), such as lobbying (through direct contacts and involvement of policy makers in project activities), capacity building (for example of government staff on the application of participatory approaches, but also in analysis and evaluation of past state interventions), and support to implementing, monitoring and evaluating policy interventions (through the PPDRI),
- Effective policy intelligence. Policy assistance is more effective if based on a good understanding of the political context, the role of various political stakeholders and their interests. The project team correctly has placed a lot of effort in seeking to understand the national and international context for policy making on steppe management, the role played by various political actors at different levels and their interests. This made is possible for the team to respond with the project to the main interests of such actors at all three levels of decision-making (local, regional and national).

It would be interesting to document this process of policy intelligence and assistance in more detail, though this might best be done by a resource person from outside the core team (also avoiding further pressure on the team to develop yet another publication).

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE PROJECT

The recommendations of this review mission can be summarized as follows:

Component	Recommendations
Efficiency	• Review and prioritise the number and type of project outputs to be produced during the remainder of the project • Promote more collaboration between the organisations involved in the project at the level of their institutional management, in order to create and maintain a facilitating working environment for the project team and facilitate institutionalisation of its results
Effectiveness	• To make sure that all models are completely operational by the start of the next growing season (February/March) the team should prioritise support to project implementation during the coming months • Such support should however be gradually transferred to other stakeholders over the course of time. This will help avoid that the team will again spread too thinly and allow them to shift their focus to the evaluation and analysis of the results of the experiments and the production of the prioritised reports and scientific articles. This will also help increase the capacity of farmers and government institutions to manage such processes in case of their future replication. • Develop a communication strategy for publishing and disseminating project findings and results to a larger audience (specifically policy makers and farmers) • Involve an external communication expert in doing so
Relevance	• Include the following indicators in the project monitoring framework: (1) Own financial contribution of the direct project beneficiaries (18 households) to expanding project activities and (2) Adoption rate of proposed technical and organisational innovations among the

	households not directly participating in the project.
Participatory action research	• Document the process in terms of what has been done, with what results, what were the preconditions for success and what would the team do different next time • Consider the possibility of including gender-related impact indicators in project monitoring, to analyse possible impacts of changes in management of the steppe on the livelihoods and interest of women
Government engagement	• Consider documenting the applied process of policy intelligence and assistance in more detail, though preferably by a resource person from outside the core team

Furthermore, and to enhance future replication of the project, it will be important to (a) demonstrate the success of the management models over a longer period of time, and preferably under different climatic conditions, (b) better understand and promote rational use of the steppe on the longer term, and (c) train (young) researchers, professionals and government staff to design and implement similar processes of participatory diagnosis, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation in other areas in the country. IDRC is therefore recommended to consider a (budget neutral) extension of the project with 1 year to allow for analysis of the results of the experimentation during at least two growing seasons, By doing so, it will also accompany the PPDRI during its entire 2-year project period (from Nov 2009-Nov 2011). If a second phase of the project is to be developed, the institutions managing the current project are recommended to continue working on a longer-term management model on the rational use of the steppe, revitalising traditional farmer knowledge, and on training a larger group of stakeholders in participatory action-research methods and models for more sustainable steppe management.